

Hot Girl Syndrome

One of the more thought-provoking CollegeHumor videos was their (exaggerated) [attempt to imagine the inner life of an attractive woman](#). One of the things it makes clear is that being a hot girl means a constant stream of positive feedback: guys turn to smile at you, they laugh loudly at all your jokes, they're always eager to do favors. The world just seems to bend itself to your desires.

One might think that such a constant stream of positive attention would make you particularly confident and resilient, but the human mind doesn't work that way; it adapts to its environment. Constant positive attention doesn't make you less dependent on praise any more than constant eating makes you less dependent on food. When someone comes along and says something mean, you don't fall back on your years of positive experiences and decide to ignore them. Instead, you're so shocked by the experience that you come away deeply wounded.

I think I first realized this when I visited a well-known author. He'd written several highly-regarded books which received apparently unanimous praise. If someone's ever criticized him for something, I've never seen it. Yet, when I saw him, he told me he'd been feeling down for nearly a week. Why? Because a reader from Australia sent him a nasty email. The endless praise hadn't made him more resilient; it had made him unusually vulnerable.

I think this explains why the pick-up artist's technique of the "neg" — a minor offhand insult intended to dent a girl's self-esteem — is so particularly effective, especially on unusually attractive women. For people who aren't used to being insulted, even a minor insult carries a powerful sting. (A major insult would probably be too strong, though. They'd be too hurt to want to even associate with you.)

Another thing made clear in the video is that bidding for a girl's affections is typically a kind dollar auction. A dollar auction is an auction where both the highest bidder *and* the second-highest bidder have to pay (even though only the highest bidder gets the prize). Rational behavior in a dollar auction isn't particularly clear — if you're the second-highest bidder, it always seems to make sense to bid a little more, since you'll lose the same amount of money but at least get to take home the prize. But if you keep doing that, you soon find yourself paying ridiculously large amounts for something you might not even get.

With girls, there isn't a formal auction, but instead guys bid by buying her things, with no promise that they'll get anything in return. Since the things you've already spent so much, it always seems sensible to spend a little more to get the girl. The result, from the girl's perspective, is that people are falling over themselves to buy you things without you having to give them anything in return.

Perhaps the safest way to win a dollar auction is not to play at all. And, indeed, this was [Richard Feynman's surprising finding with women as well](#). He takes the advice of the bar's MC to refuse to buy girls anything until "you've asked her if she'll sleep with you, and you're convinced that she *will*, and that she's not lying." (Feynman is taken aback by the suggestion: "Uh... you mean... you don't... uh... you just ask them?")

But it works, and no doubt Hot Girl Syndrome is part of the reason why. When everyone is falling all over themselves for you, the only person you have to impress is the one guy who isn't.

The application to politics is left as an exercise for the reader.

You should follow me on twitter [here](#).

July 31, 2009